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Congress urged by CIA chief to stop leaks

By STEPHEN BARBER in Washington

CONGRESS members were urged yesterday by Mr William Colby, CIA director, not to breach any more confidences. He told them damage had already been done by wholesale leaks during the past year of closed-door committee hearings into the alleged

misdeeds of America's intelligence community.

Yet even as he did so, the House Intelligence Committee's draft report on the CIA provided another leak.

It was, that Mr Colby had disclosed in a secret session that the CIA "planted" news stories on Reuters, as a non-American news agency, which it was constrained from doing on Reuters American rivals, Associated Press and United Press.

He also said, apparently, that the CIA had occasionally used foreign news media for propaganda purposes, but not American media, because of the policy against misinforming Americans.

He did not specify what these stories were. It is an open secret in journalistic circles, however, that the CIA has frequently fed information it wants to see published to foreign organisations, who accept it in good faith as accurate.

These same organisations' reports have then been quoted in the American Press.

The committee "leak" also disclosed that the CIA has 11 journalists on its payroll working on 15 newspapers, magazines and broadcasting services and the agency's own news organisation—which was not named. The "leaks" are as selective, evidently, as the "plants."

It was recently reported that the CIA found itself obliged to create a special inter-agency group to screen news stories it might itself have generated by "planting" them so that a policymaking level the Government would not be misled.

Truth and lies

In London, Mr Gerald Long, Reuters managing director, had a proper retort to these latest allegations. He pointed out that the British agency had been in business for 125 years, "largely because we know the difference between truth and lies."

If the CIA or anyone else had been paying Reuters correspondents to pass on its handouts in the guise of news, he said, "it is highly likely that (it) has been wasting the taxpayers' money."

Mr Long called for proof that Reuters had been manipulated. He is unlikely to get it.

The absurdity of the situation created by the House Intelligence Committee's leaks is that the newspapers most consistently harrassing the CIA are those like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* which have in the past had no hesitation in using information that reached them from CIA sources, as "scoops" of their own.

But this was not what was bothering Mr Colby yesterday. He was dealing with the Senate sub-committee on government operations, which is studying reforms to the CIA.

He pleaded that any future "oversight" committees the sub-committee might recommend should be restricted to very few members because experience had proved that Congress as a whole was very bad at keeping secrets.

He said that as a result of the airing of so much evidence given by the intelligence services behind closed doors this year, a "totally erroneous impression of continued failures of American intelligence" had been given to the public.